

VZCZCXRO3407
RR RUEHAO
DE RUEHPO #0509/01 2631935
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 201935Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
TO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9693
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 1490
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO 1168

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARAMARIBO 000509

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FOR DEFENSE SECRETARY ROBERT GATES FROM AMBASSADOR
LISA BOBBIE SCHREIBER HUGHES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/20/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [NS](#)
SUBJECT: (C) Briefing information for October 6
meeting between Defense Secretary Gates and
Surinamese Minister of Defense Ivan Fernald

Reftel: Paramaribo 501

Classified by Ambassador LBSH for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

Preview

1.(C) During our 18 September meeting, Defense Minister Fernald told me that he looks forward to the chance to meet you during your short visit to Suriname on Saturday afternoon, October 6. Fernald will join me in welcoming you at the Johan Adolph Pengel International Airport (approximately one hours drive from Suriname's capital city of Paramaribo). Given the compressed schedule, Fernald has agreed to meet with you at the VIP lounge of the airport, rather than at Defense Ministry headquarters in Paramaribo. Immediately following your (short) bilateral meeting, you, the Minister, and Ambassador Schreiber Hughes will proceed to visit the USNS Comfort via a 30-minute helicopter ride.

Minister Ivan Fernald: a Biography

2.(SBU) Prior to assuming his current position in September 2005, the Minister had no appreciable military background. The 51-year-old Fernald has a teaching degree in physical education, and has worked as an educator (mainly athletics) for most of his adult life. The Minister has an impressive career as an amateur athlete, having medaled in both karate and taekwondo. He is married with two children, speaks Dutch, English, and Sranan Tongo (the local Surinamese language), and is a member of the National Party of Suriname (NPS, the Creole-based party of the resident; the largest political party of the governing coalition). Until his nomination as Minister, Fernald was not known to be politically active.

3.(C) As Minister, Fernald has not made much progress in improving relations between the uniformed military and its civilian leadership. Post attributes this in part to his lack of experience in defense matters, and in part to long-standing antipathy between the Office of the Minister and the well-respected Commander of the Armed Forces, Colonel Ernst Mercuur (it should be noted that both Fernald and Mercuur appear to enjoy strong

relationships with President Ronald Venetiaan). Nevertheless, Post has a good working relationship with both the Minister and the CHOD, and considers Fernald one of the most accessible members of the President's Cabinet. Both the Minister and the CHOD recognize and appreciate the support they receive from the USG, and try to demonstrate their appreciation to the extent that they are able. On the sensitive issue of Article 98, Fernald's is the lone government voice urging support for the U.S. position.

Background Information and Issues: Gates/Fernald
Bilateral

4.(SBU) Issue 1: Suriname's military is under-manned, under-resourced, and unpopular with the Surinamese public yet shares responsibility for defending the nation against myriad threats.

Background Information: Severely under-manned and under-resourced, the military is nevertheless responsible for the near-impossible task of safeguarding all land/riverine/airspace within Suriname's porous borders. Two border disputes with Guyana -- one on land in the interior; one maritime -- remain highly charged issues for Suriname's military. The maritime dispute was submitted to the OAS, International Law of the Sea (ILOS) tribunal for resolution, and the currently-embargoed ILOS decision will be released today (20 November). In anticipation of that release, Minister Fernald declared to the

PARAMARIBO 00000509 002 OF 004

press that Suriname's armed forces would stand ready to defend the nation's sovereignty. What Fernald's statement means exactly remains unclear, probably also to him. Post conjectures that Fernald intended a political statement to assure the Surinamese public that the MOD is on top of the matter.

According to a Ministry of Defense analysis of strategic interests, threats to Suriname are (in rank order): transnational crime (e.g., narcotics trafficking, terrorism, money laundering, illegal immigration and migration and the illegal arms trade, as well as illegal logging and gold mining), environmental pollution, natural and manmade disasters, smuggling, kidnapping, fragility of public utilities, infectious disease, deforestation, weak economy based on a lack of economic diversification, and weak governmental institutions. Given this laundry list of a (mostly non-military) threat environment, compounded by residual public mistrust due to memory of military coups (reftel), Suriname's armed forces face serious challenges that they are ill-equipped to handle. In an effort to combat increasing crime in Suriname's jungle interior, the Ministry of Defense has partnered with the Ministry of Justice and Police to patrol some of the more remote areas of the country.

5.(C) Issue 2: Defense Minister Fernald is focused on military outreach to the civilian community, arguably at the expense of the military mission.

Background Information: Since military rule ended in Suriname in 1992, there has been a strained relationship between the civilian government and the armed forces. In 1992, during President Venetiaan's first term, the civilian authority took bold steps to strip the military of its overreaching constitutional powers, despite strong protests from the armed forces. During Venetiaan's last term, his

Minister of Defense was disliked by many in the armed forces who perceived him as unresponsive to their needs (above text from reftel para. 8). Since his installation two years ago, current Defense Minister Fernald has made it his personal mission to improve the military's image with the Surinamese public. He appears strongly focused on issues surrounding civilian control of the military, recognizing that a mutually respectful relationship is essential. Although these objectives are laudable and essential, some within the armed forces grumble that the Minister's attention is too focused on civilian outreach (particularly through sports; an MOD-sponsored marathon is scheduled for this fall), at the expense of the pressing need to better-resource and professionalize his army, seven-boat navy, and five plane (none of which can currently fly) air force. In this regard, Fernald appears to share the same criticism as that levied on his predecessor.

6.(C)Issue 3: United States engagement with Suriname's Ministry of Defense and uniformed services greatly benefits our bilateral relationship.

Background Information: DoD and the Ministry of Defense have a strong, multifaceted relationship which includes extensive humanitarian as well as military aid. Our USG relationship with Suriname's MOD and the Suriname Defense Forces is one of the best that we have in this otherwise sometimes prickly bilateral relationship. Not coincidentally, the MOD -- together with the Ministry of Justice and Police, where we also enjoy good relations, are the only two Ministries that in the past could regularly count on USG development assistance: modest amounts of IMET, FMF, and INCLE (above text from reftel para. 5). Although it has not signed an Article 98 agreement, nor has Suriname yet become a signatory to the ICC.

In addition to IMET and FMF, Suriname has been an eager MEDRETE recipient, has embraced the opportunity to receive the USN Hospital Ship Comfort, and will also welcome New Horizons in 2008. The Surinamese military and civil society are also enthusiastically

PARAMARIBO 00000509 003 OF 004

partnering with the State of South Dakota in the National Guard State Partnership Program. Still under consideration by the Surinamese Government is a proposal from the U.S. Army's Yuma Proving Grounds to establish a jungle test center in the western part of the country. Through DoD continued strong engagement in Suriname, the USG demonstrates support for the professionalization of Suriname's armed forces, for strong civil-military relations, and for democracy and the rule of law in Suriname.

Talking Points

-- Pleased to have this opportunity to visit Suriname and the USNS Comfort, and appreciate your flexibility in agreeing to meet here at the International Airport. Also pleased that you will be able to join me in visiting the Comfort, once we conclude our meeting.

--Understand that the Ministry of Defense and Surinamese Armed Forces, particularly the NCCR (please spell out acronym), together with the Ministry of Health, have been strong partners with us in making the Comfort's visit a true benefit for the people of Suriname.

-- Hope that you see the Comfort as a strong demonstration of support and friendship from the people and government of the United States to the people and government of Suriname. Certainly, that was the intent of President Bush when he sent the Comfort and its doctors and nurses to this region.

-- On the subject of support and friendship: understand that our United States Southern Command has a strong, longstanding, multifaceted relationship with your Ministry and armed forces which includes humanitarian as well as military aid. I hope and expect that we will be able to continue to provide both IMET and FMF assistance, recognizing that the ICC and Article 98 will remain critical issues in that regard.

-- I also understand that New Horizons will be coming to Suriname in 2008, and know that we can count on your partnership and support to make this huge humanitarian and infrastructure support program a success. At this time, do you have any special expectations for New Horizons?

-- We already appreciate your strong support for Suriname's involvement in the U.S. National Guard-sponsored State Partnership Program. The State of South Dakota is an enthusiastic partner to the Republic of Suriname, and I am sure that this relationship will only grow and become more robust in the future.

-- I was advised that last June you and your Ministry gave representatives from the U.S. Army's Yuma Proving Grounds the opportunity to brief the Surinamese government on Yuma's proposal to establish a jungle test center. Do you have any sense yet whether the Government of Suriname will agree to this proposal?

-- We remain strongly committed to helping you in your work to further professionalize Suriname's armed forces. We recognize that domestic resources remain a problem. Is this situation likely to improve in the near future?

-- I also understand that you are committed to civilian outreach, notably through sport, and was impressed to learn of your own academic prowess. Physical fitness is always a challenge for our overworked staffs. How do you find the state of your own forces? Health and fitness'

--Speaking of readiness: what is the biggest threat currently facing Suriname? How would you assess your current ability to address it/them?

PARAMARIBO 00000509 004 OF 004

--How does Suriname view the recent decision by the ILOS regarding the maritime border?

-- Thanks for taking the time to meet. Shall we proceed to the helicopter for the trip out to the Comfort?

SCHREIBER HUGHES